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ABSTRACT

The social and collective aspect in human activities has become one of the main issues in Vygotskian analyses of learning and development. The study assumed that this aspect presupposes some feeling of belonging together and having a shared commitment on the part of the participants. Asserting that relatively little attention has been given to this "togetherness" in research on learning activities in general or on communities of learners, the study addressed the phenomenon of togetherness among a group of 6-year-old students and their teacher in Amsterdam (The Netherlands) who were involved in a collaborative text-construction task. The issue was studied mainly from a participant perspective. After a theoretical analysis of the notions of togetherness and conflict, analysis was done of a videotaped episode of collaborative work, using Hicks' (1996) multi-layered model of activity analysis. Findings showed that in this learners' community, a variety of strategies were used by the participants to maintain the togetherness in their shared activity. The paper concluded that "togetherness" is a real and meaningful aspect of collective activities; the study of which may deepen insight into the dynamics of a community of learners and its activities. (Contains 79 references.) (EV)

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Signs and Problems of Togetherness in a Community of Learners

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SIGNS AND PROBLEMS OF TOGETHERNESS IN A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

Key words: Vygotsky, learners' community, togetherness, collaboration, young children, conflict.

Abstract: The social and collective aspect in human activities has become one of the main issues in Vygotskian analyses of learning and development. In this article we assume that this aspect presupposes some feeling of belonging together and having a shared commitment on the part of the participants. However, until now relatively little attention has been given to this 'togetherness' in research on learning activities in general nor on communities of learners. This article addresses the phenomenon of togetherness in a group of six-year-old pupils with their teacher who are involved in a collaborative text-construction task. The issue is studied here mainly from a participants' perspective. After a theoretical analysis of the notions of togetherness and conflict, we analyzed a videotaped episode of collaborative work using the multi-layered model of activity analysis of Hicks. It turns out that in this learners' community a variety of strategies were used by the participants to maintain the togetherness in their shared activity. It can be concluded from this that 'togetherness' is a real and meaningful aspect of collective activities. The study of togetherness may deepen our insight in the dynamics of a community of learners and its activities.

The social and the cognitive in the process of learning

It is a common assumption of the Vygotskian approach to conceive of learning and development as occurring in a communicative setting, that is, as happening among people. Learning, then, is not seen as a process of acquisition of isolated individual acts to be mastered by drill and practice. Obviously the social dimension is acknowledged as intrinsic to any interpretation of the Vygotskian approach to learning and development.

However, the precise relationship between the social and the cognitive is still a matter of debate. From a Vygotskian point of view, we can distinguish different forms in which the social manifests itself in educational practices designed for cognitive learning:

- In *content*: people learn by taking part in a sociocultural activity and appropriating cultural actions and forms of conversation [see for example Hicks, 1996; Wertsch, 1991]. The contents of learning are products of the sociocultural history of a culture, and are as such essentially social [Stodolsky, 1988].
- In *interaction*: "The cultural contexts that favor mental development", writes Bruner [1996, p. 68], "are principally and inevitably interpersonal, for they involve symbolic exchanges and include a variety of joint enterprises with peers, parents, and teachers". This idea fits in with Vygotsky's law of interiorisation that says that all appropriation of the higher psychological functions originates from interpersonal interaction. Interpersonal interaction thus creates an activity setting that provides the structures, cues and symbolic impulses from which the participants can reconstruct their own consciousness in order to make it better adapted to what they see as the actual exigencies of their sociocultural environment. The same is considered to be true for the learning of cognitive information. Social interaction, embedded in a sociocultural activity, forms the direct context of learning processes. The acquisition of cognitive contents, then, is conditioned by social factors that characterize the interactions between agents. In this line of reasoning the zone of proximal development is similarly conceived of as an interpersonally constructed ['collective', Moll and Whitmore, 1993] space. Or as Erickson [1996, p. 59] put it: "there is no zone at all unless people construct it interactionally".

Hence, the social dimension is undeniably involved in all learning. In the actual communication between a teacher and pupils or between peers the cognitive and the social are integrated and speech activity can be considered as the main embodiment of this socio-cognitive construct. This acknowledgement led researchers to a conception of the learning process as a mainly discursive activity that is to a great extent regulated by interactive

processes in the practices in which they are embedded. Hence, the notion of learning and thinking in apprenticeship relations became more in the center of the researchers' conceptualizations [Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Wells and Chang-Wells,1992]. The strict separation between the inner (psychological) and the outer (social) was criticized as untenable [Rogoff, 1995]. Rogoff claims that no such boundary exists between the inner and the outer world. Development takes place in the world and not in the mind. This makes development, thinking and learning essentially social [see also Packer, 1993]. As Rogoff et al. [1996] have shown, this starting point also has consequences for our view on teaching and learning as well. Teaching and learning are seen now as closely related social processes sustained by participation in the activities of a community, or more particularly at school: in a community of learners. Within this perspective on teaching and learning knowledge is essentially conceived of as co-constructed [e.g., Valsiner and Voss, 1996], not only as far as the operational aspect of knowing is concerned, but also with regards to the norms implied in the various areas of knowing [see, for example, Cobb et al., 1993, who proposed the idea of sociomathematical norms].

In this article we want to address the complicated issue of the interrelationship between the cognitive and the social dimension in a learners' community on the basis of a micro-analysis of an activity of six-year-old pupils and their teacher, collaboratively working at the production of a written story. Although we can admit that the content of the group's activity and the interactions among the group's members contributed significantly to the social nature of the activity, we think is implausible that the members' sticking together in this activity can be explained completely on the basis of the social nature of the content and the interactions alone. We assumed there must be some 'deeper forces' involved that explain why the group stays together in the often demanding and contradictory process of collaborative activity. We became interested in the kind of factors that are required to make a collection of people (in our case: some pupils and their teacher) into a group, a learners' community.

Getting started in a learners' community

A learners' community can be conceived of as a "group of people with similar *interests* and goals who constitute themselves with a characteristic language" [see, for example, Bruffee, 1993, p. 223]. The language of the group, however, shouldn't be understood too narrowly as meaning that the members of the group speak the same social language or dialect, but

'language' here primarily refers to the *speech genre* [in the sense of Bachtin, 1986] as well. That is to say that the members of the group share a technical vocabulary and a basic set of values and rules regarding how the language is to be used. Speech genres are generally defined as "typical forms of utterance associated with a particular sphere of communication (…) which have developed into 'relatively stable types in terms of thematic content, style and compositional structure'" [see Morris, 1994]. A learning community can be characterized as a social unit employing the same dominant speech genre [see also Carpay and van Oers, 1999].

In addition to the shared interest and the shared speech genre, a learners' community can be characterized as being diverse regarding the meanings involved. A learners' community typically displays a *distributed form of intelligence* that produces its outcomes by negotiation of its diverse meanings [see, for example, Salomon, 1993]. In academic research groups there is often some leading idea that the members of that community share, accompanied by divergent meanings, connotations and alternative views on details. In the classroom forms of learners' communities we can observe similar situations. The learners' community as a simulation of an academic learners' community, however, is still essentially different from an academic group of researchers. The eye-catching difference here is the special position of one of the group members in a classroom's community of learners: the teacher. The teacher plays a typical role in the learners' community of the classroom [see, for example, Bruffee, 1993, p. 28]. On the one hand he or she is considered to be a member of the group taking his or her share in the negotiation of meaning (proposing solutions, utterances etc.). This is necessary for the constitution of a learners' community with a distributed intelligence. On the other hand, the teacher also has a guiding and monitoring role (revoicing the student's utterances, accomplishing tasks none of the other members yet masters, regulating the group process etc.). This is necessary for educational reasons, based on the teacher's responsibility to take care that all members of the group can learn from the joint experience. Moreover, such a situation then also creates the conditions for the learning process to become more than a mere exchange of ideas, as it also engenders a polylogue, i.e. a negotiative conversation with dominant scientific ideas or historical voices ('texts'). By so doing the teaching-learning process in the learners' community actually construes intersubjectivity, i.e. a common understanding of the issue at hand by pooling the diverse points of view and by negotiating about the possibly shared meanings linked to these different contributions that the participants are ready to take as shared consensus. Alternatively, we can say that a collective subject is created as a result of the participants' actions: a collective

subject that manifests itself as a shared culture of a community that cannot be attributed to one of the participants alone.

The phenomenon of learning in groups has attracted an explosively growing attention over the past decades. Most of this research is related to the field of cooperative learning that has been defined as "(...) organized and managed group work in which students work cooperatively in small groups to achieve academic as well as affective and social goals" [Lee et al., 1998, p. 59]. According to Putnam [1993, p. 17] "positive interdependence is the essence of cooperative groups - it is achieved when students think in terms of 'we instead of me'". There are some basic general characteristics, that also form criteria for cooperative learning [see, for example, Lee et al., 1998, pp. 59-64; Putnam, 1993, pp.16-21; see also Argyle, 1991, pp. 125-126]:

- positive interdependence. Learners have the feeling that what helps one member helps all and what hurts one hurts all;
- face-to-face promotive interactions, where learners interact directly with each other. The cooperative group provides an intimate setting that permits direct and unmediated communication;
- individual accountability. Learners feel to be responsible for both their own learning and for their peers;
- both social and collaborative skills are learned;
- group processing: groups discuss the dynamics of their interaction, evaluate them and seek for ways to improve them;
- heterogeneous groups. Learners have differences in skills, knowledge and experiences;
- equal opportunity for success.

When comparing a cooperative learning group with a learners' community, it is obvious that there are several similarities, for instance, the emphasis on we-ness, social involvement and interdependence of participants. Some authors prefer the term collaborative learning in cases where the interdependence of participants is essential and encompassing, and not merely complementary [see Damon and Phelps, 1989]. Moreover, both of these types of learning include more mature members and less mature members working together. However, there is one clear difference between them: it is the teacher's role. In cooperative learning, the activities of the groups are carefully prepared, planned, and monitored by the teacher, but the teacher does not participate in them [Lee et al., 1998, p. 60; see Johnson and Johnson, 1994]. The teacher's role is to be academic expert, classroom manager [Putnam 1993, p. 31]. In the learner's community also the teacher is an active participant of the working group. All

members play active roles in shared endeavours, although particular roles may vary from one community or one situation to another [Rogoff 1994, p. 213; see also Davydov, 1996].

Although the social and affective dimensions in cooperative and collaborative learning have been acknowledged by researchers, most analyses of the learning processes in the context of the participatory interaction in a learners' community have until now exclusively focussed on processes of meaning development through negotiation of meaning and discursive activity [see Campione et al., 1995; Forman et al., 1993; Hogan and Pressley, 1997; Moll, 1990], or semiotic activity [van Oers, 1994; van Oers and Wardekker, 1999]. The question in these studies is primarily how the exchange, sharing, and confrontation or clash of meanings stimulates the elaboration of both the communal knowledge and the personally available meanings. The process of meaning making, writes Hicks [1996, p. 120] is an "emergent response to the parameters of particular discursive contexts". Conflicts and disagreements seem to be a quite important dynamic element in such learning processes, according to Hicks [see also Billig, 1996; Light and Littleton, 1998]. The participation in a learners' community probably also requires the adoption of a speech genre that includes criticizing as one element of the conversational maxims of the group's culture [see Forman, 1996].

However, the current focus on the cognitive side of interaction processes probably gives us too limited a view on the processes that sustain the activities of a learning community. Quite rightly, Light and Littleton [1998, p. 186] already write: "To get much further, we shall need to integrate a fuller understanding of children's social perceptions and emotional responses with our accounts of 'how groups work'". Argyle [1991, pp. 125-126] distinguishes a number of characteristics that is required for the well functioning of cooperative groups. In addition to an attitude of giving mutual help, to an agreement on the division of labor, and to individualization of the group's motivation, it is essential, according to Argyle, that there is commitment to the group, a feeling of loyalty; and there must also be some interpersonal attraction in order to guarantee the cohesiveness of the group. As Buzelli [1996] has argued, participating in social discourses has strong moral implications as well: "within a moral culture of discussion respect and care are taken when engaging in inquiry with others and their ideas. Neither persons nor ideas are dismissed out of hand" [Buzelli, 1996, p. 528]. By all means, participating in a learners' community is definitely more than just a cognitive business.

Given these theoretical considerations, it seems obvious now that children do need more than just cognitive strategies to solve the conflicts that arise during their collaborative

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activity in the group. At least the group members should be able to perceive the other participant as a benevolent member of the community, driven by his or her own theoretical interests, and absolutely not intending to produce any personal harassment by the critique. We assume, then, that the development of a group's culture in which the social climate allows for critique, conflict and divergence of meanings is an important part in the formation and maintenance of a community of learners. Until now, however, this aspect of the learning community rarely has been given explicit attention. In our investigation we focus on this social aspect of learning based on social relationships in the group, in addition to the previously described manifestations of the social dimension in terms of content and interaction. In order to understand the collaborative activity in a group and to see how the different contradictions and conflicts can lead to learning outcomes, instead of a break-down of the group, we need to get more insight in the group's social and affective climate, and how it is maintained despite the disagreements, contradictions, and conflicts that may arise.

It is also clear, however, that the competences required for successful participation in a learners' community are rooted in social group experiences that children have from an early age on. This feeling of being a group and maintaining some kind of loyalty to each other in a shared activity can be observed in the role-play activities of children as well. According to El'konin's [1972] developmental theory, children's development is driven by two types of activity, one is based on the activities of dealing with objects, leading to the learning of actions and operations with those objects, and resulting in cognitive knowledge about the objects; the other type of activity is based on interactions with people of their social environment, leading to the learning of how to relate to other people, and resulting in social, normative, and moral knowledge about social intercourse. The dominance of these activities alternates during development. At the age of three to six children are most intensively involved in exploring the social-normative type of activities in the context of their role-playing. Gradually this perspective on the world changes in the following years into a second type activity, called learning activity, basically focussing on the cognitive aspects of the world of physical and cultural objects [see also Smirnova, 1997, pp. 73-74]. There is now indeed some empirical evidence for the assumption that the quality of previous group experiences and communications contribute to the emergence of positive emotions towards being a member in social groups, as well as to the constitution of a coherent group [Repina, 1987; Zaparožec and Neverovic, 1986]. It is plausible to assume that this social-normative learning of interrelating in a group of people strengthens the child's ability to get involved in a

learning activity [Podd'jakov and Michailenko, 1987] and to participate in a learners' community.

As a first step into the study of the prerequisites for taking part in a community of learners driven by a shared learning motive, we were interested to find out what kind of cognitive and social strategies are used in a group of young learners in order to keep the group together, and to maintain or raise a feeling that was dubbed 'togetherness' by one of us [Hännikäinen, 1998, 1999]. In her previous studies with two to four years old children Hännikäinen [1998] investigated how these children manifested signs of togetherness in their role play. Assuming now that part of the social competence needed to maintain togetherness and to participate successfully in a later learners' community were already rooted in young children's play activity, we focussed in the present study on a group of six years old Dutch pupils that could be supposed - according to El'konin's [1972] developmental theory - to be in the transition stage from play activity to a more formal style of learning activity.

In this article we want to present the outcomes of a preliminary theoretical and small-scale empirical study concerning this social aspect of the activity of pupils in a small group. Through the analysis of the notion of togetherness we will present first those characteristics that we used for the analysis of the activity of our target group engaged in a collaborative story composition task.

Defining the notion of togetherness

There is no precise definition and operationalisation of the notion of togetherness. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English [1995, p.1521] defines it as "the feeling you have when you are part of a group of people who have a close relationship with each other". According to this definition togetherness has to do with affects and social relations; the participants share a sense of belonging together and forming one group.

In literature, instead of the term togetherness, related terms like affiliation, connectedness and we-ness are also used. For instance, Hatch [1986] when describing and analyzing, among other things, children's strategies for expressing feelings of affection and belonging in a kindergarten group, speaks of peer affiliation. Freeman [1992, p. 118] uses the term affiliation "to refer to more or less stable interpersonal relationships that involve both frequent interaction and positive sentiment". This definition of affiliation is close to the idea of togetherness. Moreover, togetherness seems to be a property of friendship, although in our

opinion togetherness cannot be seen as a synonym to friendship. Of course, like togetherness, friendship has also different definitions. However, the term friendship is often reserved for an stable, dyadic and voluntary relationship marked by preference, reciprocity, and shared positive affect [e.g., Bukowsky et al., 1996, pp. 1-3; Howes 1987, pp. 253, 257; Rubin et al., 1998, pp. 625-626]. Thus, compared with togetherness, friendship rather points to a dyadic than a group relationship.

Unlike children's friendship, togetherness is seldom recognized or considered in research literature and it has hardly been an explicit research theme. There exist, however, many studies of children's friendships [e.g., Corsaro, 1985; Howes, 1983; Howes 1996; Parker and Gottman, 1989], as well as studies of peer interactions and peer relations [e.g., Dunn, 1993; Howes, 1987; Rayna et al., 1993; Strandell 1994; Thorell, 1998] in which togetherness has been touched upon. A more direct focus on togetherness can be found in the studies of Hatch [1986] and Hännikäinen [1999]. The single indicators of interpersonal relations depicting togetherness found in all these - mainly observational - studies can be categorized into at least three types of interpersonal relationships: (1) relating by emotions, empathy and loyalty, (2) relating by special attention to each other, and (3) relating by cooperation. The categories are partly overlapping, and all of them include both verbal and non-verbal signs of togetherness:

- *Relating by emotions, empathy and loyalty*
  - having interest in and understanding of each other's feelings and needs;
  - sharing feelings and states of mind;
  - enjoying for and with the others;
  - praising, comforting, conciliating and encouraging;
  - performing courtesies;
  - taking the side of a peer involved in a dispute, coming to aid a peer who had been physically or emotionally hurt;
  - playful teasing;
  - hugging, wrestling, bumping, nudging, holding hands, grooming, carrying each other, touching, 'sticking' physically to each other;
  - enjoying being 'naughty' together;
  - giggling, playing with words and 'nonsense'.
- *Relating by special attention to each other*
  - pointing out similarities in appearance, experiences and activities;
  - confirming the other's point of views;

- expressing identical views;
- recalling joint experiences;
- using conspicuously often the others' names when speaking to them.

• *Relating by co-operation*

- joining in the others' activity;
- negotiating and planning joint activities;
- sharing materials;
- creating and sharing rules;
- offering help;
- waiting for the others.

Hatch [1986] found that also warm smiles and shared eye contact were frequently used by children to show togetherness. Moreover, the physical contact seemed to be very important for them in all classroom contexts. The children did not even need personal space: when possible, they placed themselves in positions so that their knees, hips, elbows, arms or legs were touching. Also a study of politics and alignments in children's play dialogue by Thorell [1998] demonstrated the same: the preschool children expressed closeness by sitting close to each other, putting arms around each other's waists, embracing each other and scrubbing cheeks together [see also Hännikäinen, 1999].

Togetherness is basically a feeling, but not a freely floating sensation: it requires a shared activity with other people. For children, joint play is an activity where togetherness is no doubt present, however, to experience togetherness seems not to be dependent on the kind of activity, which is shared. In the day care centers, manifestations of togetherness were also found in adult-initiated, structured activities such as circle time, gymnastics, drawing, painting and handicrafts as well as routine activities like mealtimes, dressing and undressing, resting and naps. [Hännikäinen, 1999].

The children do not only express togetherness to each other, but also to their teachers - and vice versa. This was visible in various situations where a teacher was present [Hännikäinen, 1999]. When the teacher, for instance, read a fairy-tale to the children, she and the children were physically close to each other, sitting on the floor, discussing the fairy-tale and other things awoken by the fairy-tale, showing interest in each other's talks and apparently enjoying to be together in a quiet, nice atmosphere.

Because of its connectedness with social relations, togetherness is unquestionably also linked with social competence. Hence, prerequisites for development of social competence, such as the ability to take one's own place in the group, the ability to cooperate and the ability

to express oneself and share meanings might also be seen as prerequisites for togetherness as well. Moreover, various components of social competence, such as perspective taking, role taking, empathy, positive affect and prosocial behavior, e.g. helping, sharing and comforting, will here be taken as signs of togetherness. [On social relations and social competence, see, for example, Rubin et al., 1998].

Togetherness between people is achieved and maintained by verbal and non-verbal communication in a joint activity, in the same manner as a shared understanding [cf. Rogoff 1990, p. 67]. However, developing meanings, relations and feelings in a communicative activity may not be possible without differing views of the participants, or without differences that produce conflicts, disagreements and contradictions. Thus, there is reason to assume that conflicts may be an important catalyst in activities for the emergence of the feeling of togetherness.

A group manifesting togetherness has similarities with a small group called 'a focussed gathering', 'a situated activity system', or 'an encounter' in the classical works of Goffman [1961]. A focussed gathering involves a single visual and cognitive focus of attention, a mutual and preferential openness to verbal communication, a heightened mutual relevance of acts, and an eye-to-eye ecological huddle that maximizes each participant's opportunity to perceive the other participants' monitoring of him or her. According to Goffman, when this is the case, a 'we-rationale' is likely to emerge, "a sense of a single thing that we are doing together at the time" [Goffman, 1961, p.18]. This 'we-rationale' could also be understood at least as a situational feeling of togetherness [see also Strandell, 1994, 1998, who noticed that the children's togetherness in a day care center, in the sense of being physically close to each other, arouses in them a feeling of 'we-ness' which is bound up with the situation].

Goffman [1961, p.18] argues that focussed gatherings provide the communication base for a circular flow of feeling among the participants as well as corrective compensations for deviant acts. However, the participants must share some requisites, if they are to come together into a focussed gathering and stay there for some time: they must submit to rules of recruitment, to limits on hostility, and to some division of labor [Goffman, 1961, p. 8]. Similarly, neither can togetherness be created and maintained without these requisites.

Although the requisites and characteristics of focussed gatherings resemble some of the requisites and characteristics of a learners' community, it goes without saying that not every focussed gathering is a learners' community. As described earlier, a learner's community is supposed specifically to aim at cognitive learning and development. However, there is no

plain cognitive learning: human learning is always an integration of affect and intellect [Piaget, 1981; Vygotsky, 1987].

In their analyses and categorization of cognitive, affective and regulative learning activities, Vermunt and Verloop [1999] indicate that "[These] affective learning activities, which students employ to cope with emotions that arise during learning lead to a mood that may foster or impair the progress of the learning process" [Vermunt and Verloop, 1999, p. 261]. When discussing the issues of learners' communities and togetherness, special attention must be given to the affective aspect of learning activities. This seems to be in agreement with the "affective learning"- category, that Vermunt and Verloop [1999, p. 262] call *dealing with emotions* (generating, maintaining and restoring positive feelings of well-being, self-confidence and commitment, and coping with negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, anger, stress, uncertainty, doubt, frustration, and helplessness). As more concrete manifestations of this category of learning activities Vermunt and Verloop [1999, p. 262] mention, referring to Snow et al. [1996], "talking to oneself in a reassuring way, avoiding stress, and setting realistic learning goals". It is obvious that Vermunt and Verloop from their cognitivistic perspective consider learning only in an individualized, intrapersonal way, but their emphasis on this aspect of learning might also be relevant for examining learning on an interpersonal level. How does a learners' community deal with emotions? How does 'intersubjecivity', the mutual understanding that is achieved between people in communication [see Rogoff, 1990, p. 67], contribute to it?

Thus, togetherness is connected with positive emotional contact, along with positive social relations embedded in shared activities. Many Scandinavian studies show that social relations is one of the most significant factors that make the life in the day care center and preschool meaningful for the children [Huttunen, 1989; Huttunen and Tamminen, 1992; Hännikäinen et al., 1997; Langsted 1994; Rautiainen, 1994]. We tend to assume that this also applies to the initial years of primary school. Presumably, being positively affiliated with others as a child is a significant factor for mental health later on in life. Children need and want to have satisfying affiliations with each other.

Hatch [1986] pointed out how children work in sophisticated ways and with remarkable persistence to satisfy their affiliation needs. Nevertheless, according to him, children's interactions connected with affiliation in school are - or at least were, more than ten years ago - limited or officially discouraged by the teachers. It is possible, he argues, that teachers do not fully understand the importance of such interactions to the psychic and social development of children [Hatch, 1986, pp. 315-316]. Also Salyer (1994) pays attention to the

same issue: he speaks of ambivalence that teachers feel when children, while working together, are not only talking of the task, but also 'off-task', 'around-the-edges'.

There is no reason, however, to expect that teachers would not understand the value of social competence for an individual and for a society. The problem might be in realizing that several interactions promoting togetherness do also promote development of social competence, although they at the first glance might seem to disturb or prevent orderly classroom learning.

Outline of the approach

From the theoretical perspective outlined in the previous sections we became interested in how participants of a learners' community (including both pupils and a teacher) actually go about in maintaining the group's social interrelationships, despite the different disturbing and even conflictuous events that may arise during their interactions. In this section we first present the task that we chose for the study. This task was an activity of collaborative story making on the basis of a few pictures from a children's picture book. This activity was well prepared in two preceding classroom activities and was prone to raising conflicts and opposing views. In our analysis of a part of this task (based on a 38 minutes video-taped conversation among the pupils and their teacher regarding the task at hand) we started from a methodological stance that views collaboration as a complex, polyphonic, multi-layered activity [see Hicks, 1996]. Then, after presenting the task, we present a brief analysis of the notion of conflict, as this turned out to be a central notion in studies of social and cognitive development. We finish the section with a description of our analytical framework for the interpretative analysis of our episode of collaborative story making

Context and task: text production in a literate environment

The research took place at a school in Amsterdam that holds an educational philosophy close to Vygotsky's. One of the main features of this school is its aim to create a close social community at school and to establish rich literate environments for children of all grades[1]. The pupils involved in the episode that we studied, were then in the last semester of grade 3 and were just beginning readers. Their writing ability was definitely not enough for writing

extended stories independently. In the shared activity the role of 'writer' was assigned to the teacher. They agreed that she would write down the story that the pupils would make up. The teacher also participated in the story making activity as a critical reader and listener, commenting on the pupils proposals when it was not clear what they meant and suggesting compromises. For example, when the reference of anaphora was not clear, the teacher asked, "what do you mean by that?"

In the present session the teacher and four pupils (two boys and two girls) develop a story related to a page from a picture book[2]. In two previous sessions the teacher had already done some trials of story making activity in the classroom to ensure that the children got acquainted with the format of the activity setting and did really know what this story making means. During these previous sessions the children had made a beginning of a story on the basis of the same book. The four children volunteered for continuation.

In the previous sessions a picture had been exposed to the children, showing a landscape, with a green pasture, a house at a distance, a tree and a person (could be a man or a woman) sitting on a trunk under the tree. Collaboratively the children and the teacher had made up the following story to that picture, about a man called "Mr. Harry" [*in Dutch:* "Meneer Harry"; see Edzes, 1996]:

[1] *Far away from here*
[2] *lived Mr. Harry*
[3] *he lost his purse*
[4] *he went out to look for it*
[5] *then he saw a trunk*
[6] *and Mr. Harry sat down on it*
[7] *with his fat bottom*
[8] *and he pondered*
[9] *Mr. Harry went to the farmer*
[10] *and he asked for a horse*
[11] *and the farmer said: why?*
[12] *'because I lost my purse'*
[13] *and the farmer said: my wife has found a purse*
[14] *the farmer went to his wife:*
[15] *'did you find the purse of Mr. Harry?'*
[16] *the farmer points to Mr. Harry*
[17] *The wife said: I didn't find it.*

In the present, third session the teacher and the children were sitting together in a corner of a classroom on cushions on the floor, which was not unusual in this school while doing group work. The weather was beautiful outside. At the outset the teacher showed the next page of the book, picturing another landscape with green pastures, bushes, and trees; in the forefront a

farm stood out. The picture also showed the same person from the previous picture shaking hands with another person, four horses standing around; at a distance were three people with a flock of sheep. For this session the teacher started out with reading aloud the story that the children had already compiled in the previous sessions and that was written down on a sheet of paper. The group's activity was partly based on responses to their previously compiled text (proposing and discussing modifications), partly on extending the story with the help of the new picture. In general the activity can be characterized as genuinely *discursive*, as the participants brought together different meanings and discussed them seriously, looking for consensus and agreements. This third session was completely taped on video. This was the basis for our analysis.

The dialectic nature of group processes

Putting people together does not automatically create a group in the social psychological sense [see Goffman, 1961]. A collection of pupils may be considered as a 'group' in an administrative sense (like all pupils with blond hair, or with an average score on a test and so on), but such a group does not necessarily show signs of togetherness, nor do these individuals conceive of themselves as a member of that particular group. The basic tendency of a group is the intrinsic wish to form a unit and stay together (although not necessarily physically), despite conditions that may interfere with this wish. In brief, we can conceive of the basic dynamic of a group as dialectic between repulsion and attraction, between personal tendencies to be distinct from others and on the other hand to stand by each other in solidarity. Billig's [1996] interpretation of conversation in terms of the dialectic between the particular and the universal may just be a special case of this social psychological dialect between 'me-ness' and 'we-ness'.

The most widely studied condition that may drive people of a group apart is the emergence of a conflict of some sort. A conflict is essentially caused by the articulation of distinctive features of two or more individuals or groups. While focussing on socio-cognitive conflicts, Doise and Mugny [1984] already described these conflicts in the Piagetian sense as conflict in centrations but produced in a social way. Or like Doise [1996, p. 144] put it later: "Socio-cognitive conflict has often been defined in more general terms as the divergence of two proposed solutions by individuals who have to solve a problem together". However, in research the socio-cognitive conflict has been conceived mainly as a critical process in

cognitive development: the discrepancy that best sparks cognitive development is a difference in opinion between one's own view and that of others [Goodnow, 1990, p. 103]. The effect that conflicts may have on the functioning of the group and on the development or maintenance of the feeling of togetherness has been widely overlooked by researchers. In our research we focussed more on the signs of togetherness and how this is dealt with when conflicts arise.

The notion of conflict, however, needs further clarification as it is used in a wide variety of meanings in literature. In his study of the fundamental role of semiotic systems in cognitive activities Maffiolo [1993, p. 489] proposes the notion of intraindividual conflict as a conflict between cognitive and social norms. Killen [1989, p. 126] however, speaks about intrapsychic conflicts, referring to the cognitive domain only, and distinguishes them from interpersonal, behavioral conflicts. The idea to distinguish conflicts within an individual from those between individuals is adopted by many authors under different terms. Kolominskii and Zhinevskii [1992, p. 74] speak about intrapersonal conflicts when there is a clash among different motives in one person, while they use the term interpersonal conflict when there is a clash among interests of different people. In our study we will partly follow these latter authors and define conflicts in two different main types:

- *intrapersonal conflicts* which refer to all kinds of tensions within a person emerging from a clash in motives, interests, personal meanings, and (cognitive or social) norms;
- *interpersonal conflicts*, which generally refer to all kinds of clashing differences between people. In this respect we distinguish *relational conflicts* (when the opposition between people turns into an affective and personal dispute, like quarrels, fights etc) and *socio-cognitive conflicts*, which can be subdivided into *disagreements* (negations of another person's proposals, pointing out a difference, like for instance "I don't like that" or "no, this is different", "I don't agree with you"), and *contradictions* (consisting of opposing views, like 'black versus white', or 'Harry stays here' versus 'Harry goes with the farmer to his wife').

In our research the process of developing and maintaining togetherness is viewed in connection to how the participants in the activity deal with these kind of conflicts when they arise. On the basis of our material, however, we could not access to possible intrapersonal conflicts and no relational conflicts occurred. Hence we focussed only on the socio-cognitive conflicts.

In her analysis of the story making activity of children in a classroom setting, Hicks [1996] proposed a methodology for contextual inquiry, stating that actually the activity is a multi-layered process that encompasses four different levels [Hicks, 1996, p. 113]:

- the level of the shared contexts of meaning which constitutes the social activity in a given classroom setting. Quite rightly she argues [Hicks, 1966, p. 119]: "the construction of meaning was a process of social enactment -framed, though not fully determined, by the social history of an activity setting (...), and of the individuals engaged in that activity". We shall call this level the *sociogenetic level*;
- the level of the enactment of the meaning construction within a particular activity setting in the classroom; we shall call this level the *discourse genetic level*;
- the level of the contributions of each individual participant to the flow of a shared activity; we call this the *microgenetic level*;
- the level of the changes in the individual participants' meaning (re)constructions over time; we call this the *ontogenetic level*.

In our own analysis of the video-taped activity we focussed mainly on the three first levels, and wanted to examine how the appearance and maintenance of togetherness can be understood in terms of processes occurring at these levels. We do not have data concerning the ontogenetic process of development of the individual participants over time. Hence, nothing can be said here about the fourth level of analysis. Nevertheless, we think that the sociogenetic, discourse genetic, and microgenetic levels of analysis already give substantial information about the signs and problems of togetherness in a learners' community. Our theoretical framework provided the categories of our analysis. It was mainly based on the theoretical description of the notion of togetherness, as well as on our conceptualization of the notion of a learners' community. As we already pointed out, conflicts, disagreements and contradictions could be a threat to the togetherness of the group. The nature of the task quite easily may rouse conflicts, disagreements, or contradictions [like Hicks, 1996 already found]. The tendency to solve conflicts, or accept disagreements rather than let them escalate, disturb the atmosphere of the group, cause the break down of the group, or a drop out of any of the members, was interpreted as a sign of the group's propensity to maintain togetherness. We

were primarily interested in the kind of strategies used by the participants to maintain togetherness.

Manifestations of togetherness in a collaborative activity of a learners' community

With the help of an event selection strategy we analyzed the videotape from the perspectives of the three levels indicated above. By so doing we illuminate how the participants involved deal with the opposing views and contrary feelings in this activity in order to sustain the group's shared activity, and what strategies they use to maintain togetherness.

Maintaining togetherness by measures at the sociogenetic level

Manifestations of togetherness are not just incidental phenomena. Like the process of meaning construction, the establishment of togetherness of a group is also dependent on the social history of the activity setting involved. As was said before, the school had established a tradition with the children of giving much attention to stories and to literacy development. Literacy activities, including making stories, are seen as an important activity that is to be dealt with in a serious way. In addition to that, the activity setting of collaborative story making was also prepared by the teacher in at least two prior session in which children could get acquainted with story making. So we can expect that part of the behavior of the children in this setting is a result of their familiarity and their acceptance of the setting. Consistent with the findings of Hicks [1996], we found that some of the participants' actions were also actually responses to the activity setting that was established over time in this classroom.

The most remarkable demonstration of this was the general tendency in the group to produce one consensual story. The children obviously had different stories in their minds, but nevertheless they kept on looking for consensus and for developments of the story that they all can agree on. This looking for agreement was definitely a feature that was induced by the activity setting as such, and part of the proposals of the children for the modification or extension of the story consequentially must be considered as being primarily a response to the activity setting that was established in the history of this group. A clear example of this can be found in the discussion that starts (in the fifth minute) with *"the farmer went to his wife"* (line 14). The discussion runs like this, children uttering disagreements:

Lieke: "Actually I like it better that Harry walks over with the farmer."

Liesbeth: "No, I don't like that."

Michiel: "Neither do I."

Teacher: "Well, we have to decide....(...)"

Then the discussion continues about what to do with the horses that were shown on this second picture. Lieke is still unsatisfied, though, with the idea that the farmer goes to his wife and leaves Harry behind. In this discussion the teacher emphasizes that they have to find a solution and that they make this story together (in the seventh minute). Everybody agrees with that. Then the teacher continues (in the eighth and ninth minute):

Teacher: "Can't we settle that Harry walks with the farmer to the wife, then we make it as Lieke wants it to be."

Liesbeth: "Well, yes I actually like it that way, that they walk together to that woman."

Michiel: "Yes."

Lieke: "That's what I mean."

Teacher: "Should we do it for Lieke, as she would like it so much?

All the children agree.

Teacher: "Well, that's very good of you, where do we...."

Lieke: (interrupting the teacher) "Or we can do both."

Liesbeth: "No, that's impossible."

Teacher: "No, for he cannot both walk with the farmer and stay under the tree."

Liesbeth: "Or....or he can walk halfway."

Teacher: "What do you think, Lieke?"

Lieke: "Yes, he walks halfway, until this point (she points at the picture)....and then the farmer continues alone to his wife."

Willem shakes his head and says nothing, but in the tenth minute he says:

(...)

Willem: "But I....but I...."

Teacher: "We are not going to change the whole story. We have this story, but we have to clarify it further."

Willem: "I just want that he stays here, and that the farmer tells him that he hasn't found his purse."

After a brief negotiation the teacher finally decides (in the twelfth minute) that Willem's version of the story is not followed:

Teacher: "I want to write it down. I think that most of you want.... Michiel wants is, Liesbeth wants it, Lieke wants is, except Willem....Well, then Willem must....(the teacher addresses Willem) I am not so sure, Willem, but if those three want it, perhaps we must do it that way."

Lieke: "And then next time we do it your way."

Teacher: "Oh, that could be, what do you think, Willem?"

It is notable to see how the teacher tries to push for agreement: it is obviously her wish to stick to the format of this activity setting, and reinforce the fact that the story making is a shared activity. She first suggests a direct proposal to solve the disagreement ("Can't we settle that Harry walks with the farmer...."); later she even refuses Willem to change the course of the story again. Here the teacher obviously prompts togetherness with the help of formal measures that originate from the regime of the setting as such. And the children agree with this format.

Another remarkable aspect of this episode is that Lieke herself, who was pleased by at least two of the other pupils and by the teacher, after the apparent agreement, unsettles the whole consensus. She is the one who suggests that possibly a middle position could be found ("Or we can do both"). She is obviously trying not to be too bossy and maybe rouse some tension in this group that may drive them apart. We can interpret Lieke's step as an attempt to reassure the togetherness in this group. She has got her way, so there is no reason grounded in the story itself that would suggest this idea. We suppose that Lieke here also responds to the nature of the activity setting as such, which strongly suggests that they should do it together.

At other moments we saw that the teacher also had to take special 'didactical' measure for keeping the group together. Finally the circumstances also turned out to become a threat to the togetherness of the group, as could be recognized from the fact that some of the children

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were momentarily dropping out. The whole activity gradually turned out to be rather exhausting for them. The session apparently lasted to long for them, and as it was hot outside, they wanted to go outside and play. After the seventeenth minute we can notice that all children, one after the other, temporarily drop out of the activity (saying that they want to stop, playing with their shoes, or passively laying back). Then the teacher explicitly addressed those children to ask their opinion, to ask them to sit down, or to look at the picture. These were also quite formal manners for keeping the togetherness in the group that originated from the 'didactical contract' that was intrinsically linked to the activity setting. But the teacher never forced the children (which would be against the educational philosophy of that school). She always tried to negotiate with the children or find intrinsic means to keep the group together, as we shall also see later in this analysis.

We can conclude that the teacher employed different strategies that assured the togetherness, related to the social history of this group. For one thing she gradually constructed the activity setting by getting children personally involved in the activity. She had built this common history with the group by organizing different settings of story making, which installed the obligation of doing things together strongly. In the first half of the target session, there was no problem of getting the children involved and inspired to find shared solutions. In the second half, the session turned out to be exhausting for at least two of the children. From this moment on the activity itself was not appealing enough anymore to keep the children completely involved at every minute; the teacher apparently felt necessitated to use more formal measures like calling on some children or addressing them directly. She also started to speak about finishing the story.

Maintaining togetherness at the discourse genetic level

The whole course of the conversation proceeds on the basis of socio-cognitive conflicts, both disagreements and contradictions. The progress of the story is partly based upon cognitive strategies of both the pupils and the teacher, founded on the implicit maxim of *logical or narrative coherence*.

Appealing to a sense of logical or narrative coherence. One important disagreement occurred immediately in the first minute when the teacher read aloud the story that they had compiled thus far. The story tells that "*the farmer went to his wife*" (see line 14), but Lieke

prefers another version, namely that Harry follows the farmer to his wife. The others, however, oppose and say that Harry should stay where he is, so that it makes sense to write that the farmer has to point from a distance to him (line 16). The whole discussion on this issue lasts from the first minute until the twelfth minute. Finally, three of the children agree that Harry follows the farmer, at least halfway. The style of their argumentation is mainly rational, using different kinds of arguments, like that it doesn't make sense to point when Harry is already with them, or by saying that it makes no sense to point, as the wife cannot see Harry from where she stands, because there is a tree halfway. Finally they find a solution somewhere in the middle: Harry walks with the farmer halfway and waits at the tree, where the wife can see him.

This kind of rationalizing negotiations (constituting or improving the logical or narrative coherence) happens several times during the whole episode. Later in the development of the story, the group discusses whether the wife had found the purse, and what she did with it. Then the children after some discussion decided that she gave it to the shepherds ("because they are poor"), but here again a negotiation emerges as to how much money the wife should give to the shepherds. Liesbeth and Lieke want to share half of the money with the shepherds, but Willem objects:

Willem:	"But I don't want that; I want that all the money is given back to Mr. Harry."
Teacher:	"Why don't you want to give the shepherds some money?"
Lieke:	"Yeah, because the shepherds need it."
Willem:	"But not half of the money!"
Teacher:	"Oh, you want to give less?"
Liesbeth:	"A quarter, then."
Lieke:	"A quarter-piece[3] (kwartje)."
Liesbeth:	"No, half of a quarter."
Lieke:	"No, no, a fiver, a tenner?"
Teacher	"A tenner, Willem?"
Liesbeth:	"No, you can only buy one sheep then."
Lieke:	"A tenner and an fiver."
Liesbeth:	"Twenty-five guilders."
Teacher:	"What do you think, Willem?"
Willem:	"Well, I just want two tenners or so."

Then the matter is settled. Two tenners it is. Here again the children seem to use a fairly straight negotiation strategy (although they don't give explicit arguments for their statements) to find consensus for the further development of the story.

Building a common identity with respect to the story. These were mainly cognitive-rational strategies, but in the mean time the children also want to reconfirm their own authority in making this book as they want it. In the thirteenth minute Lieke asks:

Lieke:	"Are we the authors of this book?"
Teacher:	"Yes, you are the authors."
Lieke:	(to the teacher)"But you too."
Teacher:	"Me too?"
Liesbeth:	"Yes, you write, we make up the story"
Teacher:	"Yes, you make it up, so *you are the real authors.*"

This happened a few times during the whole conversation. It has to do with emotional binding with the activity, with the definition of a shared identity (a sense of "we-ness"), but also with authority (who may decide what is going to happen!). In the thirty-sixth minute, while discussing the title of the story, there is again a lot of disagreement and contradiction. Willem thinks a title should be given to the story:

Teacher:	"Do you think we need to put something above the story, Willem?"
Willem:	"Yes, Michael wants it, Liesbeth wants it and I want it, but Lieke doesn't."
Liesbeth:	"Well, the question is what Hester (the teacher) wants."
Teacher:	"*But it is your story, you have made it up....*"

By confirming that they are the writers of the book, the children so to say "contextualize" their actions, and as such produce coherence in their shared activity as well as particularize the activity of being an author of this particular story [see van Oers, 1998]. But more importantly they built up some kind of contextualized story about themselves as partners in this shared activity. This contextualization is thus a strong means for the maintenance of togetherness, both in a cognitive and in an emotional way. During the whole conversation,

this 'we-are-the-authors-of-this-book' calls for a shared identity (a shared story about themselves as a group) that can be supposed to lay a firm basis for their togetherness.

Revoicing. Another conversational means for confirming the unity of the group's cognitive activity can be seen in the teacher's acts of revoicing the pupils phrases, and thus illuminating the position of each pupil in a more generalizing way. Others now could better agree or disagree with (or oppose to) that utterance [see O'Connor and Michaels, 1996]. An example of this is a situation, in which Liesbeth and Willem are discussing whether Harry walks over with the farmer or not, and the teacher summarizes (in the eleventh minute):

Teacher:	"That's what Willem says. So Willem actually wants that the farmer later walks back to Mr. Harry to tell him."

Or when the children are discussing alternatives for the title:

Teacher:	"What shall we put above our story?"
Liesbeth:	"Mr. Harry."
Willem:	"Noooooo."
Liesbeth:	"Mr. Harry has lost his purse."
Teacher:	(revoicing the disagreement in a more accessible way)"Why is that better than just 'Mr. Harry'?"

In the mean time Lieke is browsing through the picture book, and finds out that this book has a title of its own. They discover now that this book is called '*Arno travels on*' and that the name of the person is not Harry but Arno. The children decide that they keep the name Harry, but the idea of traveling is appealing for the children: the title 'Mr. Harry travels on' is suggested (in the thirty-third minute).

Teacher:	"So, 'Mr. Harry travels on', right?"
Lieke, Michael and Liesbeth:	"Yes."
Teacher:	"But is our Mr. Harry traveling?"
Liesbeth and Willem:	"No."
Lieke:	"Yes, to look for the purse."
Willem:	"No, I don't want that."

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Lieke:	"No...."
Willem:	"I just want that Mr. Harry, eh....that Mr. Harry is going to look for his purse."
Teacher:	"So, is going on a trip to find his purse back?"

By revoicing the children's utterances in a summarizing way, the teacher creates for the children new opportunities to respond to each other's ideas. We interpret this as another strategy for enhancing togetherness in the group. Certainly, when the children get exhausted (as was the case in the fragment where the above episode was taken from), this revoicing supports the children's abilities to do the work together.

Articulating the object. Probably the most powerful means for maintaining togetherness in the story making process is the strategy of articulating the object of conversation, i.e. putting the content of the story to the foreground. As long as the children are interested in the content of the story they all participate in the story making. In the beginning the content of the story was engaging, but in the last part of the session (after about twenty minutes) at least two of the children began to have moments of absentness. The whole fuss about Harry walking with the farmer to his wife or not seemed to be too much for Willem. Already in the thirteenth minute he said: "I don't understand a least bit of this" and in the eighteenth minute he says: "This takes too long", and at the end (in the thirty-eighth minute): "I want to go playing". Nevertheless, this same Willem discusses very engagedly the problem of the sharing of the money with the shepherds or when it comes to the question of the title of their story. Every time when the content of the story makes a significant turn, and arrives at a crucial moment, Willem contributes significantly to the shared activity. It seems that togetherness strongly depends on the recognition of a shared object of activity. The teacher but also the children use different strategies to articulate the content of the story. Even after twenty-six minutes it is possible to revitalize all the energy of the children to participate together in the story making activity by referring to "Mr. Harry's fat bottom". The content of the story, and mainly the references to the main person (the hero) is a very important means for these children to maintain the togetherness. Obviously, it is the object of an activity that finally creates a basis for togetherness, even under unfavorable conditions.

Maintaining togetherness at the microgenetic level

In the following analysis we consider the microgenetic level both from the viewpoints of 'a collective subject' and of the individual subjects. By the former we refer to all the participants showing signs of togetherness, which cannot be considered to be a contribution of only one single participant. In the course of the entire 38 minutes session, this 'collective subject' expressed togetherness in terms of joint involvement and committedness (all the participants were bodily present, active and alert, and showed mutual attention) several times and in many ways. It was evident that manifestations of togetherness of the collective subject were based on a joint dedication to the content of the story, *thus related to the object of the activity*. These signs of togetherness, then, were most conspicuous when there were important decisions to be made regarding the course of the story (for instance, whether Mr. Harry should do this or that, whether the money was found or not, whether the shepherds got all the money or just a bit or what the title should be). At these moments all the pupils were highly involved and a collective togetherness was striking. All in all such moments tallied up to a total of approximately 20 minutes (divided over 17 separate shorter sequences). Notwithstanding the apparent intensity of the collective togetherness, this implies also that togetherness was again and again broken by the absentness of one or more participants. At these moments we could observe that it was always one of the group members, often the teacher, who attempted to get the distracted member involved again.

The seventeen object-related sequences of togetherness included 12 small episodes (adding up to a total of about three minutes) where all the children (and often also the teacher) expressed signs of togetherness *related to the interaction and relationships* (not focussed on the content, but just *'around-the-edges'*). At such moments we could witness examples of the three broad categories of togetherness that we constructed on our theoretical basis. Most of these signs had to do with activities of relating by *emotions, empathy and loyalty*: three times there was laughing at 'Mr. Harry's fat bottom' so enjoying to be 'naughty' together and three times playing with words. In one occasion the children showed understanding and acceptance - after the teacher's requesting suggestion - in Lieke's strong wish to get her idea through regarding the content, thus jointly doing a favor to her, and by so doing also showing *a special attention* to her. Three times it was question of relationships on the basis of *co-operation*: all the children and the teacher referred jointly to the collaboration and its outcome (the book) by emphasizing we-ness: "We are the authors of this book", and twice the other

children confirmed jointly and with an enthusiasm Willem's point of view regarding the content, thus dealing with the relationship based on *a special attention* to one another.

What was the role of the individual subjects in creating and maintaining togetherness? When looking back, we have already given examples of it regarding the object of the activity at the sociogenetic and discourse genetic levels. Let's now give attention to individual contributions at the microgenetic level, highlighting togetherness related to the interaction and relationships, and starting from the teacher.

The teacher. In addition to her active participation in the story making as a critical reader and listener and to her role as the 'writer', the teacher also contributed to maintaining and strengthening togetherness related to the interaction and relationships (outside the content, 'around-the-edges'). She mainly used three patterns: 1) referring verbally to we-ness and the collaborative work, sometimes also as a response to the children's questions, 2) drawing indirectly an absent child back to collaboration and 3) directly asking a child to pay attention and collaborate.

Most of the verbal utterances dealing with we-ness and collaboration (this kind of utterances occurred altogether 11 times) concerned group identity, where the teacher, depending on the context, referred to all the participants including herself ('we are the authors'), or to the children only ('you are the authors', 'you do the story together', 'it is your story'). We-ness always implies some sort of 'otherness' or other people, either in a form of inclusion or distinction. Here, the teacher pointed out that this group wrote the story, but it was meant for others, too:

> Teacher: "I'll write your names on it, and then I write the whole story in a nice way, and then we go and read it to the small children...."

The teacher explicitly seemed to expect every child to contribute to this we-ness and collaboration. Sometimes this required submissions and compromises of the children both for a benefit of the minority and of the majority. In the first example Lieke has an idea that the others do not share, and in the second example Willem is in the same situation:

> Teacher: "(...) Should we do it for Lieke, as she would like it so much?"
> (...)

Teacher: "(...) I think that most of you want....Michiel wants it, Liesbeth wants it, Lieke wants it, except Willem. Well, then Willem must. ..I am not so sure, Willem, but if those three want it, perhaps we must do it that way."

As regards indirect means to draw a child back to collaboration (in total 9 times), the teacher mostly just made an eye-contact to the child, asked if the child could see, suggested the child to read the story or asked the child to express his or her opinion. Once she did it jokingly, smiling at Willem, when he was not involved:

Teacher: "By me, Willem does no more understand this."
Willem: "No, not the least bit."[4]

As often as indirect means she used direct means (10 times), by asking the child to listen or to sit down or straight.

Lieke. Lieke was from the beginning to the end enthusiastic and tireless to make the story, but she also was the one of the children who paid most attention to create and maintain togetherness related to the interaction and relationships. She was almost every time involved in the discussion of the authors of the book, also reckoning the teacher among the authors. Thus, she had an important role in strengthening the identity of the whole group. Moreover, several times she showed her interest in individuals as part of the group. She said kindly to Willem, after the teacher had asked him to submit for a favor of the majority: "And then next time we do it your way." She also paid special attention to Willem, after he had declared not to understand 'the least bit of this' by repeating in a friendly, laughing voice: "Not the least bit!" Later on, after the teacher had turned to the 'absent' Willem, she continued in the same humorous, teasing way: "You don't understand the least bit, Willem, eh?" Also Liesbeth got her special attention, when the teacher was reading aloud the story:

Teacher: "....[Mr. Harry] remained to sit by the tree (in Dutch: 'boom')...."
Lieke: (crying out for joy when discovering the word 'boom', which also is Liesbeth's family name) "Hi, Lies, your family name is Liesbeth Boom! Here is Boom!"

During the story making she was eager not only to discuss, but also to refer to and point at the pictures in question. The only time that she was briefly not alert had also to do with turning over the leaves of the book, together with Liesbeth. This 'transgression' was noticed and forbidden by the teacher.

Liesbeth. Except some short intervals Liesbeth was an active agent in the story making process. Moreover, she also contributed to togetherness related to the interaction and relationships. Like Lieke, several times she took part in the discussion about the authors of the story thus pointing at collaboration and feeling of we-ness. When, for instance, the group discussed the title of the story, she reminded the others:

Liesbeth: "(...) actually we make a book of our own."
Teacher: "Yes, we have made a story of our own. Yes, it is true what Liesbeth says: we have made a story of our own to the picture."
Liesbeth: "And [it means] that we have not copied it."

Like Lieke, Liesbeth also wanted to include the teacher into the group as a co-author:

Liesbeth: (to the teacher) "Yes, you write it [the story], we make up the story."

During the session the participants were sitting close to each other, and, when discussing, the children looked interested and friendly at each other and smiled to each other, but hardly touched each other physically. Here Liesbeth was an exception: a short time she was foot-playing with Michiel, and a little later she noticed that the strap of his shoe was open, so she tied it - without saying a word. And still later, as the discussion of the title was going on, she lost for a moment her interest in it and leafed, bodily close to Lieke and together with her, in the book. The teacher, however, seemed to consider these interactions as a problem: when she noticed them, she prohibited them. - For Liesbeth, the incidents with Michiel might, for instance, have depicted caring and a special relational attention to him.

Michiel. The first ten minutes Michiel was actively involved in the story making process, mainly expressing his agreement or disagreement with the solutions discussed by the others, but now and then also eagerly pointing at the picture, making a question or giving a comment. Then, the next twenty minutes he was often with his own thoughts and even bodily

further from the others. However, when requested, he expressed his opinion, often by nodding or saying "yes, me too" or just "no". For a while he was Liesbeth's partner in 'disturbing' togetherness: as Liesbeth placed her soles against his soles and was foot-playing with him, he let it happen. The game finished at once when the teacher asked Liesbeth to finish it. All in all, Michiel's contribution to togetherness turns out to have been limited.

Willem. As seen in former sections, Willem had an important contribution to the story making regarding the content of the story. Although now and then withdrawing from the discourse, he again and again returned to it, awoken by new changes in it or by request of the teacher. He, for instance, was very exact that the story was grammatically correct. Moreover, he often tried to give arguments to his viewpoints. Although he needed a long time to express his opinions, the other children usually showed patience to listen to him, and seemed to appreciate his opinions. A nice feature in him appeared when he, in spite of his own slowness, once helped Lieke to re-express her idea (which she had presented already earlier):

Teacher: (writes and reads) "And then Mr. Harry asked 'do you have my purse?'"
Lieke: "[Harry asked] *'may I get my purse back?'*"
Teacher: "'Do you have my purse?' or 'do I get my purse?'"
(...)
Liesbeth: "I think better is 'do you have my purse?'"
Willem: "Me too."
Teacher: "But does he know that they have his purse?"
Lieke: "But I mean...."
Teacher: "Lieke, first we write this and then you can change it."
Lieke: "But I mean...."
Willem: (looking at Lieke) "*'May I get it [the purse] back?'*"
Lieke: "*'May I get it back'.*"

For Willem, a particular way to share with others was to make fun of himself. When dropped out from the discussion, Willem answered to the teacher's remark 'by me, Willem does no more understand this', humorously: "No, not the least bit." This utterance remained for a while a joint joke of the whole group.

Focussing on togetherness related to the interaction and relationships, 'around-the-edges' at the microgenetic level, we can say that there were five participants sharing the story

making process, being together and showing togetherness, but all of them contributed to this togetherness differently. The teacher's role was significant: she was all the time aware what was going on in the group. She made consistently every effort to keep the group together, and it seemed to be important for her that the group had a feeling of doing together, and of being 'us'. Yet, her means were positive, even when using direct means (when she gave a look at a child or told the child sit straight) she did it in a friendly way.

As to children, Lieke took care of that the peers as well as the teacher got individual attention through her friendly words and empathy. Moreover, she also seemed to be the teacher's helper when talking 'around-the-edges': several times she joined in and continued the discussion started by the teacher and confirmed the teacher's views or extended them by her own views. Also Liesbeth had in many ways a clearly active part in creating and maintaining the feeling of 'we-ness', but in addition she took the initiative in displaying 'problematic' forms of togetherness: foot-playing and leafing in the book - together with another child. Willem's mainly contributed to the object-related togetherness, whereas Michiel's personal contribution was peripheral also in this respect. However, together with the other participants, Michiel had also an essential part in forming 'the collective subject', especially related to the object, but also related to togetherness 'around-the-edges'. It was just this collective subject that was laughing together, word playing together and showing shared joy while being 'authors of this book'.

Discussion and conclusion

The Vygotskian approach to human learning and development typically puts the social dimension in a core position of the theoretical explanations. In describing children's activity Vygotsky himself used a terminology that expressed the sharedness of this activity with others (sovmestnaja dejatel'nost'). So, the 'togetherness –dimension' can be viewed as a core element of the Vygotskian approach. Recent developments towards the explanation of the guided mind [Valsiner, 1998], guided participation [Rogoff, 1995], or the constitution of the community of learners can be seen as logical consequences of this perspective. However, the phenomenon of togetherness as such is yet rarely thematized in the research on learning and development. Mostly, togetherness as a condition is taken from an *observer's (external) perspective*. From this point of view 'togetherness' is conceived as a condition that could be established in a group or not. It is one way of expressing from the outside one of the qualities

of how the members of a group work towards their common goal. As such this 'togetherness' can be manipulated as an experimental variable. This may be one of the reasons that so little attention is given to the phenomenon of togetherness as such.

In our study we have tried to thematize togetherness from *a participants' perspective* and to show how togetherness functions for the participants of the activity. We reasoned that in a community of learners, there is probably more required than a formal commitment to solve a problem together. Considering the tensions that the groups often have to endure, and the conflicts that they have to cope with, it seems plausible to assume that a commitment to the group as such, as well as to the object of the shared activity will be equally necessary for a successful functioning of that group. In our study we decided to explore these assumptions within a group of young pupils with their teacher. They knew each other for a longer time, had a shared interest in the object of their activity, and collaboratively tried to solve their problem of producing a new story. We are quite convinced that these children and their teacher formed a learning community during their shared activity. This activity showed different moments of conflicts that could be interpreted as potential problems of togetherness, and that had to be solved in order to keep the group together for the achievement of the common goal.

Our research interest was primarily to show that togetherness can be seen as an inherent quality of a group's activity. We wanted to demonstrate that participants indeed tend to spend some effort in maintaining togetherness and even strengthen it as a way of countering the conflicts that may arise in the course of the activity. In order to get a grip on this 'elusive' issue, we theoretically reconstructed the notion of togetherness on the basis of findings from the literature in relation to a sophisticated notion of conflict, and we tried to provide a new description of togetherness in terms of theoretical notions and empirical data.

Our data collection was partly theory-driven as we had adopted a theoretical framework from Hicks [1996] that conceptualizes psychological phenomena within a multi-layered system of determinations. It turned out that a variety of strategies were used by the participants for maintaining togetherness, depending on the different levels from which they operated. When responding to the sociogenetic level, the strategies were more formal (for instance, straight regulations, calling children back to work, or negotiation on the basis of implicit or explicit conventions, like a didactic contract or a general feeling of honesty etc). At the discourse genetic level, however, the strategies were more focused on articulating the object of activity in an attempt to evoke a new intrinsic impulse of togetherness. Finally, we had the level of personal contributions to the flow of the activity. The strategies used at this

microgenetic level were more idiosyncratic and situative. At first sight, these interactions appeared to be off-task, 'around the edges' of the activity and more of a purely socializing nature, but nevertheless they seem to be important for the maintenance of the group's togetherness. These signs of togetherness manifested themselves in, for instance, playing around and joking.

Although we think we have demonstrated the significance of the notion of togetherness, and the relevance of studying it from a participants' perspective in order to get more understanding of the functioning of communities of learners, we must admit that there are still many open questions regarding togetherness. One of the problems in our study has to do with the question of whether we have really succeeded in getting a grip on togetherness from a participant's perspective. It is obvious that we could only get an *indirect* window on togetherness from our video-tape, based on our interpretations of the participants' actions and utterances. There is no doubt of the authenticity of these actions and utterances, so we could base our conclusions on ecologically valid material. However, we never could get a direct window on the experience and personal meaning of togetherness, for example by interviewing the participants. Initially, the sessions actually were not even meant for the study of togetherness, but they were established as an attempt of collaborative text-making. This makes our observations unobtrusive with regard to our present aim of studying togetherness, but at the same time we have lost the opportunity of examining togetherness in a more direct way. This may be still an important issue in order to get more insight, for example, in the attempts to maintain togetherness on the basis of utterances that are clearly a response to the sociogenetically developed system of activity and the embedded rules (such as an implicit didactic contract). We couldn't solve this problem here, but this may be a question for future research.

It is obvious that we have to be modest with respect to the outcomes of our exploratory study. Replication of the phenomena in other groups at other tasks is necessary, as well as a more longitudinal study of the ontogenetic (and probably culturally varied) development of the notion of togetherness itself. We could not study the ontogenetic and cultural dimension from our material, but we believe that this is an important issue for getting a deeper understanding in human development and its embeddedness in differing social and cultural conditions. The education of the world citizen, like Martha Nussbaum [1997] showed us, essentially requires a feeling of solidarity. "Cultivating our humanity in a complex, interlocking world involves understanding the ways in which common needs and aims are

differently realized in different circumstances" [Nussbaum, 1997, p. 10]. It occurs to us, that this presupposes togetherness. Isn't that enough reason to get on with it?

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Notes

[1] The data for the research were actually gathered by a graduate student of the Department of Education and Curriculum of the Free University Amsterdam. The student was a teacher at this school as well, and she was also the teacher in this activity setting [see Edzes, 1996].

[2] The picture book was titled "Arno reist verder", showing a story of a man traveling across the country.

[3] A quarter can be translated in Dutch as 'een kwart' (one fourth), but also as 'een kwartje' which is a quarter-coin of one guilder. The girls play here with the word 'kwart' (meaning 25% or one fourth of a whole) and 'kwartje' (meaning the coin).

[4] Actually Willem here uses a colloquial Dutch expression that is untranslatable in English and that is generally considered as highly informal language. In this setting it sounded funny for the children as was obvious from their behavior.